

ESTABLISHING A MAXIMUM ALLOWABLE BLOOD ALCOHOL LEVEL ACCORDING
TO BIBLICAL THEOLOGICAL AND SCIENTIFIC LIMITS.

by

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A PAPER

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My ongoing study of Bible wine indicates consumption is acceptable under the following parameters: 1) Wine must be consumed only with a full and slow digesting meal, not with a snack or on an empty stomach; 2) Ancient usage at meals and feasts must be accounted for (meals were eaten slowly, thus slowing the digestion curve; feasts often lasted a week, greatly expanding the time during which a beverage might be consumed while also increasing the total amount required to serve all guests);¹ 3) the dilution of the wine was probable, further reducing the possibility of intoxication; 4) Wine, date palm wine, and possibly ale are the only clearly allowable beverages (technically no beer was produced in the ANE); 5) Current medical research indicating alcohol is unsafe at any level must be accounted for (epistemologically scripture is our authority, not modern science, but science demonstrates benefits for low level red wine consumption not observed with any other beverage);² 6) Ancient Near Eastern data regarding the breadth of possible uses for grapes demonstrate that large scale wine making was not necessary for grape storage. Wine was a luxury product (Prov 21:17), and a more granular treatment of the evidence suggests though people did make a significant amount of wine, they also had other beverage options available (water, ale, sheep and goat milk) and could devote more of the harvest to food use than we would suspect (epistemologically the performative commands of scripture are our authority, not ancient people's consumption patterns based on archaeological investigation); 7) Biblical precept and scientific evidence indicate the maximum allowable BAC is .02%, a limit observed among those following the consumption pattern outlined above.³

This paper will seek to establish that a maximum BAC of .02% indeed falls within biblical parameters using a methodology correlating a biblical theology of wine use with scientific analysis of alcohol's effect on the body at various levels. This analysis opposes moderate use positions arguing the Bible allows mild intoxication. The analysis also seeks to address the concern of teetotalers. Teetotalers fear the uncertainty involved in concluding people

¹ Gisela Kreglinger, *Cup Overflowing* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2024), 35.

² Food grown in ancient Israel was generally regarded as superior to that grown in other regions of the world. See the helpful summary of ancient sources and modern analysis in Nathan MacDonald, *What Did the Ancient Israelites Eat?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 3-9.

³ Even this limit is debatable. I have adopted it, in part, due to studies of the relative risks of being in an automobile accident when one is sober versus other levels of intoxication. Surprisingly, for adults over 21, the likelihood of being in an accident up to a maximum BAC of .019% is slightly lower than when one is sober (16-20 year olds are 1.47 times more likely to be in an accident). At a level of .020-0.49% all age ranges are 2-4 times more likely to be in accident (the averages calculated the odds for BACs of .015 and .035). See Robert Voas, Pedro Torres, Eduardo Romano, and John H. Lacey, "Alcohol-Related Risk of Driver Fatalities: An Update using 2007 Data," *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs* (May 2012), 345-46, accessed July 20, 2026, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/223136111_Alcohol-Related_Risk_of_Driver_Fatalities_An_Update_Using_2007_Data. Many would argue due to two facts, however, that a lower limit (none) may be more advisable. First, if one is less likely to be in an accident at .015% BAC, then alcohol might still affect behavior, just not in a way that will create higher risk of driving. Second, health concerns may be different in the modern world. Ancient Israelite wine was grown under ideal conditions and is nutritionally superior to that grown in many countries. The differences between the diet God intended Israel to eat and the one consumed in the United States are significant. The modern Mediterranean diet may not have the same health benefits as the ancient one. Furthermore, animal based products in Israel consisted mostly of pasture raised sheep or goat milk and cheese and very low amounts meat. Goat and sheep milk have a different nutritional profile from cow's milk further altering the overall nutritional profile.

may have consumed beverages containing alcohol. In other words, once interpreters concede Israelites and early Christians consumed some alcohol, average believers will also conclude the Bible permits mild intoxication. In the wake of such uncertainty, abstainers find it easier simply to argue the Bible teaches total abstinence. The lighter use pattern offers a better correlation of the data than either moderate use or temperance.

Light Intoxication and Heavier Intoxication

Proverbs 23:33-34 condemns heavier levels of intoxication by outlining a range of negative effects of alcohol. Few believers would argue otherwise. First, alcoholic wine alters one's perception of reality ("your eyes will see strange things"). "Strange" [Heb. רַקִּי] in Proverbs "has a threatening nuance and relations with any such strange person or activity are to be avoided as incompatible with Yahweh."⁴ The strange woman—anyone you are not married to—is to be avoided since "she is bitter as wormwood, and the stranger (non-Israelite) poses a risk of financial loss to anyone who would cosign a debt for them (Proverbs 6:1 and 11:15). So to see strange things here indicates the person under the influence will be at risk of some catastrophic outcome due to "an inability to properly see circumstances correctly."⁵

Drinkers also "utter perverse things." In other words, they speak rashly and say what one "should not and normally would not say."⁶ They are numb to pain ("they struck me ... but I was not hurt; they beat me, but I did not feel it"). Worst of all, they are slaves. Though this passage begins with a warning that alcohol leads to woe, sorrow, strife, and wounds, and bite like a serpent and sting like an adder (vs. 29 and 32), the drinker nonetheless still says "when shall I awake? I must have another drink." In other words, "once one sobers up, there is a frantic search for the next drink."⁷

Given the dangers of altered perception and speaking rashly, one would think that a drinker experiencing these effects would recognize the danger and avoid it. But the drinker quickly develops a craving for alcohol both spiritually and physically. The physical dependence may be difficult to overcome even when one does battle royal against the spiritual aspects of addiction. Modern science now understands how the brain will literally rewire itself to deal with the constant alcohol overload. This rewiring can lead to a strong physical craving persisting for years after one quits drinking.⁸

Assigning a specific BAC to the poetic description of Proverbs 23 proves difficult. At .08% people experience "loss of coordination, balance, speech, hearing, and reaction times," but even a .05% BAC produces "reduced coordination,"⁹ so one at that moderate drinking level begins to exhibit the behavior described in Proverbs. A drinker attempting to stay below that

⁴ A. H. Konkel, "רַקִּי," *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 5 vols., ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 1:1142.

⁵ Tremper Longman III, *Proverbs*, BCOTWP (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006), 431.

⁶ Andrew E. Steinmann, *Proverbs*, CC (St. Louis: Concordia, 2009), 478.

⁷ Longman, *Proverbs*, 431.

⁸ Randy Jaeggli, *Christians and Alcohol: A Scriptural Case for Abstinence* (Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 2014), 120.

⁹ David Nutt, *Drink?* (New York: Hachette, 2020), 20. Nutt is a medical expert on the subject of alcohol and other chemical dependencies. He is Professor of Neuropsychopharmacology and Imperial College London, Chair of Drug Science (drugs.science.org.uk) and former Chief of the Section of Clinical Science at the NIH Institute of Alcoholism and Alcohol Abuse in Washington, DC. In addition to this book, he coauthored three papers on alcohol between 2010 and 2019.

level might then think they are drinking within Biblical parameters. The problem is that even a very low level of intoxication often leads to more drinking. One may fully intend not to drink too much, but “the part of the brain that tells you to stay in control—the frontal cortex—is the first part that’s switched off by alcohol.”¹⁰ Many may think they are less affected by alcohol than they actually are and they may disregarding the directives of Proverbs 23 without fully realizing it.

Drinkers generally wish to attain a lower level of intoxication than is demonstrated by extreme exemplars of Proverbs 23. “Most people who drink do not want to go beyond *first-degree* inebriation, which is characterized by slight relaxation, less self-consciousness, a sense of well-being, a slight loosening of the tongue, the ‘improvement of one’s personality, and a pleasant smile.’”¹¹ When drinking is viewed this way, it becomes yet another leisure or celebratory activity, good in its own rite and a problem only if one cannot function well in daily life or endangers others. In other words, it might differ little from watching a football game. So the question naturally arises, should alcohol actually be viewed the same way: as a leisure activity that I must limit to evenings, weekends, or holidays so that I can be confident I only “drink responsibly,” as the ads constantly remind us?

What qualifies as responsible drinking, however, is never specified in the ads and is open to interpretation. In the absence of specific criteria Christians and unbelievers probably engage in the following informal thought process. They know that in the United States, a .08% BAC is the maximum allowed by law before being charged with driving while intoxicated (DWI). Drivers also know four drinks produce this level (though it is often less). Until recently, the medical establishment has also frequently stated that 1-2 drinks per day are safe (1 for a woman). Furthermore, terminology predisposes people toward moderate use. Designating something as “moderate” makes many issues seem reasonable. The term certainly plays better in our minds than the more draconian “temperance” with its negative associations of scoldings from teetotalers and the Prohibition era. For the believer, the Bible’s frequent positive references to wine also make the moderate use position seem credible. The believer’s informally derived theology of alcohol that 1-2 drinks is a biblically sanctioned drinking pattern receives strong support from a chorus of accepted cultural norms, legal requirements, medical personnel, and seemingly even scripture.

But does this dominant view accurately reflect God’s expectations? After all, legal officials, medical practitioners, and the general population are often poor interpreters of scripture. And even many believers do not possess adequate knowledge of scripture and the ancient world to arrive at a well thought out conclusion. But in the end, all that matters is what scripture actually teaches. So the question remains: does this informal process match what the Bible specifies is too much?

Effects Produced by Light Intoxication

The marriage of Jacob to Leah in Genesis 29 is one of the most puzzling episodes in Old Testament history. The story itself is straightforward. Jacob loved Leah’s sister, Rachel, passionately, and he was willing to work for seven years to pay a high bride price.¹² At the end of

¹⁰ Nutt, *Drink?*, 15.

¹¹ William Terhune, *The Safe Way to Drink: How to Prevent Alcohol Problems before They Start* (New York: Pocket Books, 1969), 15.

¹² Andrew Steinmann notes “Jacob was offering labour [*sic*] worth between 42 and 84 shekels. Since the Mosaic law appears to set the maximum bride price at 50 shekels (Deut. 22:29), Jacob’s offer was more than generous” (*Genesis*, TOTC 1 [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2019], 281). Jacob lived four centuries before

that period Laban held the required wedding feast. But the evening the marriage was to be consummated Laban switched Rachel for Leah, a woman Jacob clearly did not want, and brought her to Jacob's tent. When Jacob woke up the next morning and saw Leah, he was shocked. He expressed his indignation, asking Laban "What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?" (19:25).

Jacob was indeed tricked, but nondrinkers may wonder how the scam succeeded. Jacob had no interest in Leah and valued Rachel so highly he paid a large bride price, so one wonders why the slightest indication something was amiss did not bring the marriage consummation to a halt. Did Leah really give no indication whatsoever through the sound of her voice or mannerisms that might have alerted Jacob to the deception? How could Jacob have no idea he was with the wrong woman until the next day?¹³

Part of the reason Jacob was fooled was the setting: it was dark and Leah wore a veil, making her harder to recognize.¹⁴ But an equally large part of Laban's success was doubtless that Jacob consumed wine at the wedding feast. That the scam worked, however, does not necessarily indicate he was excessively drunk. In fact, Laban's devious scheme probably would have worked had Jacob been only moderately intoxicated (well under .08% BAC).

Modern science explains the specific mechanisms contributing to Jacob's ill-fated wedding night. The range of effects is surprisingly broad.

This broad scope ... sets alcohol apart from many other drugs. Substances such as cocaine and LSD work like pharmacological scalpels, altering the functioning of only one or a handful of brain circuits. Alcohol is more like a pharmacological hand grenade. It affects practically everything around it.¹⁵

Alcohol's effect on five of the most important neurotransmitters is most important. Alcohol "enhances GABA, serotonin, and dopamine and at the same time blocks glutamate and noradrenaline ... in a cocktail of neurotransmitter effects."¹⁶ Every neurotransmitter begins to be affected at very low BAC, though some of the usual visible manifestations become prominent only as BAC rises. So this section will outline the effects of alcohol as described by modern science. It will also include illustrations of these observable effects as recorded in Proverbs and Old Testament narratives.

Overview: Depression of all brain functions. Most notably, alcohol severely hinders the action of glutamate, one of the brain's most important neurotransmitters.¹⁷ And since this neurotransmitter is involved in most voluntary activities (things we choose to do) and

Moses, so the bride price Jacob paid was likely even higher than Deuteronomy 22:29 suggests due to moderate inflation of silver by the time Deuteronomy was written. That Jacob considered his servitude only a few days suggests he valued Rachel highly; she was well worth the price.

¹³ Jacob had pulled a similar deception on his blind father Isaac in conjunction with a feast in Genesis 27. Jacob pretended to be Esau by placing goat skins on his hands and wearing Esau's clothes. When Jacob arrived with the requested meal, Isaac initially suspected something was amiss due to the quickness with which the meal was provided and especially due to the sound of his voice. He was convinced, however, by the feel of Jacob's hands and the smell of the clothes that it was Esau despite obvious evidence to the contrary. The sound of Esau's voice would have been much harder to imitate than the meal, the rough skin, or the smell of the clothes.

¹⁴ See the discussion in Kenneth Mathews, *Genesis 11:27-50:26*, NAC 1B (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2005), 469.

¹⁵ Braun, *Buzz*, 40.

¹⁶ Nutt, *Drink*, 6.

¹⁷ Niladri Banerjee, "Neurotransmitters in Alcoholism: A Review of Neurobiological and Genetic Studies." *Indian Journal of Human Genetics* 20 (January-March 2014): 20-31. Accessed July 17, 2024, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4065474/>.

involuntary activities (things the body does automatically such as regulate heartbeat), all these functions will be negatively affected.¹⁸

If the neurons in those areas [of the brain] control muscles, the inhibition can lead to relaxation and discoordination. If the neurons control speech, words slur and become increasingly imprecise. If the neurons control automatic bodily functions, heart rate and breathing are impaired.¹⁹

Hindered physical performance. The physical effect with which we are most familiar is, of course, the slowed physical responses of impaired drivers, but there are a number of others.²⁰ Alcohol hinders athletic and exercise performance. Even in small amounts alcohol produces “compromised motor skills, decreased coordination, delayed reactions, diminished judgment, ... impaired balance. ... [and] a decrease in endurance.”²¹ An additional problem for the athlete is that the body “preferentially metabolizes alcohol, thereby altering the metabolism of carbohydrates and lipids which are the preferred energy sources during exercise.”²² In other words, alcohol simultaneously hinders athletic skills and robs an athlete of energy when needed most. Alcohol’s effects are measurable even during light exercise, so it hinders every aspect of physical performance while providing no offsetting benefit.

Alcohol also affects balance, an effect leading to the basic police procedure of asking a suspected drunk to walk a straight line or stand on one leg. Proverbs 23:34 notes the more extreme version of the effect, comparing the tipsy drunk to “one who lies down in the midst of the sea, like one who lies on the top of a mast.” Sober people have little problem keeping their balance on dry land, terra firma. On a ship in rough water, however, and the situation quickly changes. Balance becomes difficult, and many get seasick.²³ They certainly will not want to eat and may throw up even when lying down. And that sense of movement may be quite exaggerated. One under the influence, however, has difficulty maintaining their balance even on firm footing.²⁴

Impaired thinking, learning, and memory. Many drinkers believe that alcohol helps them perform intellectual tasks more efficiently. But does it? William Terhune, who taught at Yale School of Medicine for 22 years, summarizes an informal demonstration done with medical students to demonstrate the results of alcohol on intelligence. Students were given two similar exams on successive days. They were sober during the first test but consumed one bottle of beer before the second. They were then asked two questions: which exam was more difficult and on

¹⁸ Terhune, *The Safe Way to Drink*, 27.

¹⁹ Stephen Braun, *Buzz: The Science and Lore of Alcohol and Caffeine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 50.

²⁰ Jill Seladi-Schulman, “How Alcohol Affects You: A Guide to Drinking Safely,” *Healthline* (August 30, 2019). Accessed July 22, 2022, <https://www.healthline.com/health/how-much-does-it-take-to-get-drunk>.

²¹ Claire Siekaniec, “The Effects of Alcohol on Athletic Performance,” *NSCA Coach* (June 2017). Accessed November 23, 2022. <https://www.nscac.com/education/articles/nsca-coach/the-effects-of-alcohol-on-athletic-performance2>.

²² Siekaniec, “The Effects of Alcohol on Athletic Performance.”

²³ So also Christopher Ansberry, *Proverbs*, ZECOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2024), 535.

²⁴ Some commentators note the term לִפְתָּי, a hapax legomenon, indicates the ropes used in sailing vessels. If so, “the drunken person is depicted as lying in the constantly moving rigging of the ship” (Andrew E. Steinmann, *Proverbs*, CC [St. Louis: Concordia, 2009], 471). Another interpretation is that this indicates a person asleep even in rough water. See Bruce Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 15-21*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 266. Lying down is the more likely meaning, however, since this text uses a verb normally indicating lying down (שָׁכַב). By contrast, Jonah slept deeply in the hold of the ship as indicated by the Hebrew root נָדָם.

which exam do you think you got the higher score? Students normally responded that they did better after a beer on the second test and that it was less difficult. Their subjective impression, however, was wrong. On average, student scores while under the influence of just one beer were 17% lower.²⁵

Most distressing, however, is the fact that alcohol hinders learning and remembering. “Memory impairment resulting from alcohol ranges from a barely detectable ‘cocktail-party amnesia’ to the full-blown memory blackouts experienced by alcoholics.”²⁶ In similar fashion to the test takers after one bottle of beer, alcohol “impairs memory in humans at concentrations associated with mild intoxication ... [at] a level attainable following the ingestion of a single alcoholic drink.”²⁷ At levels up to .15% BAC (almost twice the legal limit in the US), there is no rhyme or reason to what one will forget while impaired.²⁸ “You might, as a female, go to a party and you might remember having a drink downstairs, but you don’t remember getting raped. But then you do remember getting in the taxi.”²⁹ This change eventually becomes permanent as ongoing alcohol use alters learning and memory.”³⁰

Lot impregnating both of his daughters provides a good example of memory loss. His daughters knew he would not sleep with them, so they got him drunk before attempting it. We naturally think he was asleep when his daughters came to him on successive evenings. But Genesis 19:33-35 states Lot did not know when either daughter “lay down or when she arose.” The language might mean he was asleep when they entered, but it does not require that he remained asleep the entire time. He may have had a blackout. “You can do anything in a blackout that you can do when you’re drunk, you’re just not going to remember it. That could be ordering stuff on Amazon. ... People can do very complicated things. Buy tickets, travel, all kinds of things, and not remember.”³¹ Even at a level below what is normally required for a blackout, Lot may have had a spotty memory of the events. Whatever his specific BAC, he had inadequate cognitive awareness to understand what was happening or to remember it in the morning.

Sadly, these memory lapses are all too common in the modern world. A member of my extended family was sent to jail for his role in an armed robbery. He was an accomplice who drove the getaway car. He and his partners had been drinking, and though he was conscious enough to drive, he does not remember whether or not he participated in the theft. He likely would not have participated to begin with had he been sober.

²⁵ Terhune, *The Safe Way to Drink*, 12-13.

²⁶ Braun, *Buzz*, 52.

²⁷ Robert D. Blitzer, Orlando Gil, and Emmanuel M. Landau, “Long-Term Potentiation in Rat Hippocampus is Inhibited by Low Concentrations of Ethanol,” *Brain Research* (December 1990): Abstract. Accessed July 18, 2024, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/000689939090359J?via%3Dihub>.

²⁸ Partial memory loss is sometimes termed a “brownout.” See Cleveland Clinic, “Blackouts and Your Brain: How To Avoid Memory Loss” (March 13, 2026), accessed July 20, 2026, <https://health.clevelandclinic.org/brownout-vs-blackout>.

²⁹ Aaron White, cited in Malcolm Gladwell, *Talking to Strangers* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2019), 216. White is a leading expert on blackouts. The study White was involved in is not readily available via internet, so I am uncertain whether Gladwell is citing the study or an interview.

³⁰ Richard L. Bell, Youssef Sari, and Shafiqur Rahman, “Alcohol and Central Glutamate Activity: What Goes Up Must Come Down?,” Chapter 47 in *Neuroscience of Alcohol* (Academic Press, 2019), Abstract. Accessed July 18, 2024, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/B9780128131251000477>. The authors based their conclusion on studies with rats, an animal studied in medical research due its similar responses with humans to various health related issues.

³¹ Aaron M. White, and others, “Prevalence and Correlates of Alcohol-Induced Blackouts Among College Students: Results of an E-Mail Survey,” *Journal of American College Health* 51, no. 3 (2002): 117-31, doi:10.1080/07448480209596339, cited in Gladwell, *Talking to Strangers*, 218.

Creativity and Mental Focus. In contrast to alcohol's negative effect on complex mental functions, many believe a mild state of intoxication to be beneficial for tasks requiring greater creativity such as writing music or literature.

Writing is a form of exhibitionism; alcohol lowers inhibitions. ... Writing requires an interest in people; alcohol increases sociability and makes people more interesting.

Writing involves fantasy; alcohol promotes fantasy. Writing requires self-confidence; alcohol bolsters confidence. Writing is lonely work; alcohol assuages loneliness. Writing demands intense concentration; alcohol relaxes."³²

The assertion seems plausible, especially since the alcoholism rate among American Nobel Prize in literature recipients exceeds 70 percent. The lengthy list of problem drinkers includes a number of familiar authors such as Earnest Hemingway, O. Henry, Jack London, John Steinbeck, and F. Scott Fitzgerald.³³

John Steinbeck should disabuse one of the notion that alcohol enhances the creative process.³⁴ He kept a journal while writing *The Grapes of Wrath*. His entry for June 13, 1938, notes how he drank a great deal of champagne. Hangovers never help mental creativity, and the following morning, he felt his work suffered. He does not seem to credit alcohol for the quality of the work at all, stating instead that "the whole physical basis of the novel is discipline of the writer, of his material, of the language. And sadly enough, if any of the discipline is gone, all of it suffers."³⁵ It is hard to be disciplined when one is hung over. The success of *The Grapes of Wrath* is more attributable to his seclusion to focus on his work, personal ethics, political views, and ongoing obsession with the plight of migrant workers during the depression.³⁶

Alcohol stifles creativity because of its effect on mental activity. Even one drink "makes us a little dumber, less capable of handling competing complicated considerations. It finds its way into the amygdala. The amygdala's job is to tell us how to react to the world around us. Are we being threatened? Should we be afraid? ... We don't have the brainpower to handle more complex, long term considerations."³⁷ It "narrow(s) or emotional and mental fields of vision ... [and] it makes short-term considerations loom large, and more cognitively demanding, longer term considerations fade away."³⁸ Given the cognitive complexity of writing even a short work, the success of Steinbeck or any other author was in spite of his alcohol use. Steinbeck tried to write for five hours a day and did most of the work in the morning, doing his drinking later in the day.

Of course, there may be some specific contributions of alcohol to literary and musical works. Songs or books written about drug related experiences might be easier to write if one actually had the experience. Those under the influence of alcohol "will see strange things" (Proverbs 23:32). The psychedelic rock of the late 1960s provides an example due to its indebtedness to drug use. [The music] "The sound of psychedelic rock invokes three core effects of LSD: depersonalization [a feeling of separation from the body], dechronicization (the bending of time), and dynamization (when fixed, ordinary objects dissolve into moving, dancing

³² Donald W. Goodwin, *Alcohol and the Writer* (New York: Penguin, 1990), 47.

³³ Goodwin, *Alcohol and the Writer*, 2.

³⁴ Braun, *Buzz*, 89.

³⁵ John Steinbeck, *Working Days: The Journals of the Grapes of Wrath*, ed. Robert DeMott (New York: Penguin, 1989), 26-27.

³⁶ DeMott, "Introduction," *Working Days*, xii-xiii.

³⁷ Gladwell, *Talking to Strangers*, 215.

³⁸ Gladwell, *Talking to Strangers*, 207.

structures), all of which detach the user from everyday reality.”³⁹ The Beatles song “Strawberry Fields Forever,” is a prominent example of the style.

Scripture contains no positive examples of the mind-altering effects of alcohol for creative purposes. Rather, it contains a strong warning about altered perceptions. While drinking “your eyes will see strange things, and your heart utter perverse things” (Proverbs 23:33). “Strange things” translates the Hebrew word, רָץ, a term normally designating people dangerous to Israelites, pagan foreigners or the immoral woman. As applied to altered realities and people alike, the connotations of the word designate dangerous situations “and relations with any such strange person or activity are to be avoided as incompatible with Yahweh.”⁴⁰

In such an altered state, the drinker will speak “perverse things.” The word clearly indicates moral corruption, in this case with the added nuance of “false perceptions or hallucinations that make one not understand rationally.”⁴¹ Even the sober human heart is hostile to God and darkened in understanding, due to the fall. We fail to perceive reality correctly. Adding mind altering experiences on top of the normal fallen human constitution creates a doubly “topsy-turvy moral order.”⁴² And “how can one react with wisdom [to a situation] if one cannot know the reality of a situation?”⁴³ People devise evil in very creative ways, but why put yourself in a situation which would encourage it?

On balance then, alcohol and drugs do more to impede the creative process than to facilitate it. These hinderances contrast with caffeine, the effect of which may be positive for any mental activity.⁴⁴ Even those open to using drugs and alcohol for creative endeavors recognized the limits. “George Harrison insisted that psychedelic drugs were only a crude method of achieving what could better be had through Eastern religious practices.”⁴⁵ Though he probably had the hard drugs of the 1960s in mind, his comments are appropriately applied to alcohol. Both the creative process and creativity regarding subject matter comes best in reliance on the Holy Spirit, innate ability, and hard work. Why hinder those innate abilities, all of which are lowered through alcohol. And most of all, finding one’s muse for creative activity in the altered states of alcohol, drugs, or eastern mysticism cannot lead to the employment of creative ends for any good purpose.

Reduces Anxiety. Throughout history people have used alcohol to calm feelings of anxiety. War provides an extreme example. Soldiers anticipating combat will feel uneasy or frightened and the use of “liquid courage” to embolden the troops before battle is well known. It

³⁹ “Psychadelic Rock,” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychedelic_rock#cite_ref-FOOTNOTEHicks200063%E2%80%935-0, accessed 14 July 2026. For a history and further discussion of the style, see Michael Hicks, “Getting Psyched,” chap. in *Sixties Rock: Garage, Psychedelic, and Other Satisfactions* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 58-75.

⁴⁰ A. H. Konkel, “רָץ,” *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 5 vols., ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1997), 1:92.

⁴¹ James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)*, (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), s.v. רָץ, Logos Bible Software.

⁴² Waltke, *Proverbs*, 266.

⁴³ Longman, *Proverbs*, 431.

⁴⁴ See the discussion in Braun, *Buzz*, 123-136. As he summarizes, “there is no simple answer to whether caffeine is, or is not, helpful in performing intellectual tasks. The answer appears to depend both on the nature of the task being considered and on the nature of the person doing the task” (136).

⁴⁵ Hicks, *Sixties Rock*, 63

even figured prominently during the first century of US history.⁴⁶ People other than soldiers also look to alcohol to calm their nerves in a multitude of less extreme situations.

Alcohol works so well as an anxiety reducer because it produces an effect similar to valium.⁴⁷ This drug may be administered to patients about to undergo minor outpatient surgical procedures for the obvious reason—surgery produces patient anxiety. Both alcohol and valium work by enhancing the effect of the neurotransmitter GABA in the brain.⁴⁸ The effect of alcohol on GABA is already pronounced after only one drink though, of course, it is more pronounced after several.

Valium is not available without a prescription, and “anxiety is so omnipresent in today’s society that it is hardly surprising that people turn to a readily available, legal, and relatively inexpensive anxiety-reducing drug for relief.”⁴⁹ It can relax people in awkward social contexts such as parties. When flying commercially “alcohol’s calming effect is also [part of] the reason why, as soon as the seatbelt sign is turned off on an airplane, the beverage cart is wheeled down the aisle.”⁵⁰ I have even had weekend warrior athletes such as bowlers and softball players tell me that they perform better when they have a drink. Physically that cannot be true, for alcohol broadly depresses all brain functions including the regions controlling physical coordination. Nonetheless, people’s bowling scores and batting averages may improve after a drink. The improvement results not from enhanced physical performance, but from the reduction of performance anxiety.

Finally, many testify alcohol even enhances sexual enjoyment. The ancient world certainly understood this fact as ancient pornography often depicted women drinking beer during intercourse. Subjectively, alcohol may encourage sexual activity since a drink would relax anyone who was nervous in advance of a romantic encounter. Physically, however, alcohol hinders sexual response. “Scientists [have]... measured how alcohol affected penile swelling, vaginal engorgement, time required to achieve orgasm, ... and vaginal lubrication. The results were strikingly uniform: alcohol inhibited all these responses.”⁵¹

The command in Proverbs 31:6 to “Give strong drink to the one who is perishing, and wine to those in bitter distress” is often interpreted as a reference to a legitimate use of alcohol as a painkiller, particularly at the end of life. There is a legitimate use of alcohol in that limited context. More likely, however, the comment is a sarcastic remark meant to grab the attention of a king. So taken it is like “saying the equivalent of ‘Don’t act like those derelicts who drink to forget their hardships. Act like the king you are.’”⁵² That verse 7 follows up with the third person jussive volitional verb, “let them drink and forget their poverty and remember their misery no more,” suggests this broader reference to emotional pain. After all people who drink often do so to escape the emotional effects of trauma, suffering, or even a difficult life. Many are poor and miserable without being at the end of life.

⁴⁶ Susan Cheever, *Drinking in America* (New York: Twelve, 2015). Note especially chapter 2 (“The American Revolution, the Taverns of the New World”) and chapter 6 (“The Civil War”).

⁴⁷ Braun, *Buzz*, 53.

⁴⁸ Richard W. Olsen and Jing Liang, “Role of GABA_A Receptors in Alcohol Use Disorders Suggested by Chronic Intermittent Ethanol (CIE) Rodent Model,” *Molecular Brain* 10 (September 20, 2017): Abstract. Accessed July 18, 2024, <https://molecularbrain.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13041-017-0325-8>.

⁴⁹ Braun, *Buzz*, 54.

⁵⁰ Nutt, *Drink?*, 14.

⁵¹ Braun, *Buzz*, 75.

⁵² Longman, *Proverbs*, 538. See also Waltke, *Proverbs*, 508-9.

A Sense of Pleasure. Alcohol also affects the neuromodulators controlling a person's sense of pleasure, the most important of which are serotonin, dopamine, and various endorphins. Serotonin enhances a person's mood, and alcohol increases its effects. Increased serotonin "makes you more empathetic, [and is] also what makes people seem more attractive—so called 'beer goggles. In that way it has a similar effect to MDM, or ecstasy.'"⁵³ Dopamine levels rise, making you "feel exhilarated, more active ... [thereby producing], feelings of energy and enthusiasm."⁵⁴ In this sense alcohol acts as "a weak cousin of cocaine and amphetamine."⁵⁵

Nabal's refusal to give David and his men the normally expected feast portion in 1 Samuel 25 is an excellent example. He could afford to feast "like the feast of a king" (1 Samuel 25:36), but was stingy. He rebuffed David's messengers and accused them all of being little better than outlaws. Had not Nabal's wife, Abigail, intervened by acting wisely and sending a generous feast, David would have killed Nabal and all his men. After Abigail returned from her meeting with David to find Nabal feasting, "Nabal's heart was merry within him, for he was very drunk" (1 Samuel 25:36).

Of course, Nabal also illustrates the problem with drinking for intoxication. During his trip to "happy land" he had no idea how much danger he was in and how narrowly he had escaped it. When the sober Nabal heard what had happened the next day, "his heart died within him, and he became as a stone" (1 Samuel 25:37). The term likely indicates he had a stroke or heart attack.⁵⁶ Such an event is entirely plausible given the emotional shock of the news coupled with the physical effects of his binge. Nonetheless his death ten days later was attributed to God's direct action, and his last few days of life were terrifying. A similar negative outcome awaited Amnon, who was executed by Absalom's servants when he was "merry with wine" (2 Samuel 13:28).

Interrupted Sleep Patterns. Many people, especially the elderly, take a drink just before going to bed to help them sleep. On occasion, doctors have been known to suggest this treatment to patients. And it is true to a degree—a drink will help one fall asleep more deeply and more quickly.⁵⁷ But the effect becomes negative during the second half of the night. Drinkers "may not get as much REM (rapid eye movement) sleep, which is when you dream and the brain consolidates memories."⁵⁸ In some cases the effect can be quite severe. As Nutt explains,

After a night out, do you tend to suddenly wake up in the early hours, feeling alert and awake? What you are experiencing is a mini withdrawal from alcohol. This hyperactive, fight-or-flight state is prompted by a surge of the neurotransmitter noradrenaline. You may also be sweating, and you may find it hard to get back to sleep.⁵⁹

Surprisingly, Scripture even refers to this sudden shift from sound sleep to immediate alertness and energy when it likens the Lord to one who "awoke as from sleep, like a strong man shouting because of wine" (Psalm 78:65). Why would we ever associate any effect of drunkenness with the Lord, even if only metaphorically. In this case the simile captures the abrupt change in Israel from the period of the Judges to the monarchy. The Psalm begins with a lengthy account of

⁵³ Nutt, *Drink?*, 15.

⁵⁴ Nutt, *Drink?*, 16.

⁵⁵ Braun, *Buzz*, 56.

⁵⁶ See Harry Hoffner, *1 & 2 Samuel*, EEC (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2015), Logos Bible Software. Nutt, *Drink?*, 57-60, outlines the short and long term risks for alcohol on cardiovascular health.

⁵⁷ Nutt, *Drink?*, 117.

⁵⁸ Nutt, *Drink?*, 117.

⁵⁹ Nutt, *Drink?*, 117.

Israel's 300 plus years of rebellion against the Lord, tracing it all the way from the Exodus through the period of the Judges. One would think changing this situation would take a long time, but God took less than 40 years to make Israel, a scattered group of tribes largely displaced from their land by the Philistines, into a major international power controlling vast wealth by the end of David's life. So the metaphor of what the Lord did through and for David fits. When God chose David and acted, He did so quickly and decisively. He was like the drunk soldier, waking in the middle of the night with a noradrenaline fueled surge of energy.

Alcohol Deadens Pain. In response to pain, the brain releases endorphins. This "natural pain-reducing system ... gives you a chilled sort of pleasure."⁶⁰ The pleasurable sensations are a somewhat milder form of that those produced by morphine, heroin, and other opiates.⁶¹ In addition to deadening pain, the release of endorphins "also trigger[s] the release of dopamine ... which, as we've seen, directly elicits pleasurable feelings. Endorphin release is thus doubly rewarding: it dampens pain and produces, via dopamine, a mild 'high.'"⁶² Proverbs 31:6-7, discussed above, may refer to this pain killing ability. Painkillers are good when used for narrowly defined medical objectives, particularly at the end of life. Normally, however, dulling pain is dangerous, a danger described by Proverbs 23:35.

Summarizing Alcohol's Effects.

Braun summarized the major effects of alcohol on a person as follows:

We've seen that by inhibiting glutamate receptors, alcohol induces a general sedation and significantly impairs the brain's ability to store new memories. By increasing the sensitivity of GABA receptors, alcohol mimics Valium and reduces anxiety. Like a weak version of cocaine or amphetamine, alcohol boosts dopamine levels, producing a brief period of heady stimulation. And by releasing endorphins, alcohol resembles opium, giving users a rush of pleasure similar to the 'natural high' experienced after a vigorous workout.⁶³

That medical summary explains why Jacob consummated his marriage to Leah, a woman he certainly did not want. Even without a particularly high BAC, the effect on the GABA pathway clouded his judgment while reducing any sense of anxiety regarding what he was about to do. He also would have found it easy to dismiss subtle clues that he was with Leah instead of Rachel. The increased effects of serotonin, dopamine, and endorphins made Leah more attractive in Jacob's view ("beer goggles," or perhaps "wine goggles" in this case). Jacob may have gotten caught up in the excitement of the moment. Finally, the lowering of the ability to form new memories by alteration of the glutamate system explains why he may have been surprised to wake up and find Leah in his marriage bed. He may have been aware of who he was with that evening, but by morning had forgotten. Jacob illustrates a sad truth observed in modern medicine. "Alcohol use [is] commonly associated with social outgoingness and use facilitated connections with potential sexual partners; however, alcohol was more likely than marijuana to lead to atypical partner choice or post-sex regret."⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Nutt, *Drink?*, 16.

⁶¹ Braun, *Buzz*, 57-58.

⁶² Braun, *Buzz*, 57.

⁶³ Braun, *Buzz*, 58.

⁶⁴ Abstract, Joseph J. Palamar, Patricia Acosta, Danielle C. Ompad, and Samuel R. Friedman, "A Qualitative Investigation Comparing Psychosocial and Physical Sexual Experiences Related to Alcohol and

Sadly, in our culture similar unwanted sexual encounters are all too common. Alcohol is involved in everything from consensual sexual encounters by friends at a party, both of whom got drunk and then regretted the trite the next day, to date rape. Jacob's wedding to Leah certainly qualifies as a unique example. He participated somewhat willingly while under the influence. But Jacob was still victimized by Laban in that his wedding night was non-consensual. Laban's treachery was reprehensible. Lot and Noah provide two additional biblical examples of people foolishly putting themselves in compromising situations.

In the cases of Jacob, Noah, and Lot, the perpetrators bear all the weight of guilt for sexually violating their victims. These specific instances are secondary to the intoxication issue discussed in this paper. After all, that a vulnerable person was taken advantage of does not necessarily indicate wrongdoing on their part. Victims of sexual abuse, internet scams, or simply a harmful practical joke are normally innocent people, vulnerable due to being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Biblically Sanctioned Level of Intoxication

Many consider losing control of one's ability to act thoughtfully inherently sinful even when, as is usually the case, nothing tragic occurs. But even at home on an average evening people are resourceful enough to find trouble. It may be simple as nursing along sinful thought patterns while under the influence rather than confessing and forsaking them. It may be a failure to interact with others in the home in a godly manner. Beyond those risks, the modern world contains a plethora of possible trouble a click away on the internet. Drinkers visiting shopping websites "spend 30 percent more when shopping after midnight on a Friday versus on a Monday." Even worse, they purchase "fun or luxury items, and are willing to pay more for them."⁶⁵ Alcohol use also promotes higher levels of internet gambling and correlates with increased betting activity and financial losses.⁶⁶ Drinkers never really know what they will do even when mildly intoxicated, especially once they go online.

Despite these concerns and risks, several scholarly works in Biblical and Historical Theology have concluded intoxication is not always sinful. First is *Cup Overflowing*, by Gisela Kreglinger.⁶⁷ Three elements of her work set it apart from earlier books on moderate use.⁶⁸ She grew up on a winery in Germany and has an insider's understanding of wine production. Second,

Marijuana Use among Adults," accessed July 20, 2026, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10508-016-0782-7>.

⁶⁵ Martha C. White, "Drunk Americans Spend a Total of \$30B Online each year – but What They Drink Impacts How Crazy They Get," July 30, 2018. Accessed 8 August 14, 2024, <https://www.nbcnews.com/business/business-news/drunk-americans-spend-total-30b-online-each-year-what-they-n895886>.

⁶⁶ See Scott Graupensperger, Joseph Lambuth, Arvin Shaygan, Joshua Grubbs, and Ty W. Lostutter, "Alcohol use frequency relates to elevated sports betting engagement, risk-taking, and negative consequences in a year-long biweekly study of young adults," *Addictive Behaviors* 167 (August 2025). Accessed 13 July 13, 2026, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0306460325001200?via%3Dihub>, and Ohio State University Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Drug Misuse Prevention and Recovery, "Alcohol use frequency relates to elevated sports betting engagement, risk-taking, and negative consequences in a year-long biweekly study of young adults," n.d. Accessed 13 July, 2026, <https://hecaod.osu.edu/alcohol-use-frequency-relates-to-elevated-sports-betting-engagement-risk-taking-and-negative-consequences-in-a-year-long-biweekly-study-of-young-adults/>.

⁶⁷ Kreglinger, *Cup Overflowing* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2024). Her recent book overlaps considerably with her earlier *The Spirituality of Wine* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2016). The older work is longer, but I generally quote from the newer one since it represents her current thinking on the subject.

⁶⁸ Two of the more recent ones are Kenneth L. Gentry, *God Gave Wine: What the Bible Says About Alcohol* (Fountain Inn, SC: Victorious Hope, 2015; reprint, Lincoln, Calif.: Oakdown, 2001), and Jim West, *Drinking with Calvin and Luther!* (Lincoln, Calif.: Oakdown, 2003).

she is not approaching the issue of alcohol in general sense. Rather, she is investigating the theological importance of wine consumption in Historical Theology and church history. Her work includes a survey of wine during the periods of Old Testament Israel, intertestamental Judaism, the church fathers, the medieval period, and the reformers. She even discusses its use in the United States.

Finally, Kreglinger emphasizes drinking wine as part of a diet consisting of whole, organic and, when possible, locally grown foods. She explains her rationale as follows:

Only the last two or three generations have turned away from gardening and farming.

Because politicians decided to favor and support agribusinesses, large corporations now grow much of our food and they care little about God, the health of the land, or the well-being of the people who live on the land. Most foods grown, harvested, and processed by these agribusinesses are processed into unhealthy foods. They create an unbalanced diet and contribute to now common diseases such as type-2 diabetes, various types of cancer, Alzheimer's, and cardiovascular diseases, to name just a few.⁶⁹

As somebody who eats a mostly organic Mediterranean diet (minus the wine, but with coffee), this emphasis was refreshing. Study after study has noted the benefits of this diet. One such study concluded that it offers a 46% better chance than a standard western diet of healthy aging (defined as “survival to 70 years or older with maintenance of 4 health domains: no major chronic diseases or major impairments in cognitive or physical function or mental health”).⁷⁰ Furthermore, within such a dietary pattern red wine provides certain benefits unavailable in *any* other alcoholic beverage (including white wine). Of course, the amount of wine consumed as well as the conditions under which it is consumed are key considerations as to whether or not such consumption is within the bounds of what Scripture permits. And consuming red wine should not be viewed as mandatory for one's health. No one component in the Mediterranean diet can adequately explain the benefits. Rather, it is the combination of nutrients the whole diet that proves beneficial.⁷¹ So no abstainer should feel they are missing out on something necessary for optimum health. Seventh Day Adventists consume no alcohol and collectively they are one of the longest living population groups in the United States.⁷² But the fact remains that *limited* red wine consumption may be beneficial.

Another example is John Anthony Dunne's recent *The Mountains Shall Drip Sweet Wine: A Biblical Theology of Alcohol*. As the subtitle suggests, it is a biblical theology of the topic, but one with a decided point of view regarding modern alcohol use. He states, “in full disclosure, one of my favorite hobbies is exploring wineries, craft breweries, and cocktail bars across the US and around the world. I am also a homebrewer, and I love hosting craft-beer receptions, tastings, and cocktail parties.”⁷³ From this mindset, his work branches out to include more academic

⁶⁹ Kreglinger, *Cup Overflowing*, 33, 34. On the other hand, the positive aspects of modern agriculture should not be completely dismissed. In spite of the limitations of modern agribusinesses, they have largely eliminated famine, food scarcity, and starvation.

⁷⁰ Cécelia Samieri, Qi Sun, Mary K. Townsend, Stephanie E. Chiuve, Olivia I. Okereke, Walter C. Willett, Meir Stampfer, and Francine Grodstein. “The Association Between Dietary Patterns at Midlife and Health in Aging: an Observational Study.” *Annals of Internal Medicine* (November 5, 2013). Accessed February 5, 2025. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/24189593/>. Unsurprisingly, switching to this dietary pattern helped to largely resolve my struggles with type 2 diabetes.

⁷¹ Michael Pollan, *In Defense of Food: an Eater's Manifesto* (New York: Penguin, 2008), 179.

⁷² Valter Longo, *The Longevity Diet* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2018), 71-73. Among other factors, the increased lifespan of Adventists is also related to the consumption of a mostly plant based diet.

⁷³ John Anthony Dunne, *The Mountains Shall Drip New Wine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2025), 10.

discussions of ancient Greek, Roman, and Jewish practices from extrabiblical sources, and of the process of growing grapes and making wine. So, it is a Biblical Theology, but one in conversation with these other disciplines.

Dunne makes a number of positive contributions to our understanding of how wine was used and even produced in the ancient world. He makes frequent references to Rabbinic Judaism's views and use of wine. In line with his emphasis on Biblical Theology, his chapters on wine as a temple offering, as part of the last supper, as part of the Eucharist, and in early Christian meals as discussed in 1 Corinthians 10-11, are all helpful even if there are points of disagreement along the way.⁷⁴ Dunne also includes good discussions of the symbolic and literal significance of wine in Biblical Theology. A positive comparison involves the emotional effects of wine compared to those of love in Song of Solomon ("your love is better than wine"; 1:2). Negatively, wine is also a metaphor for judgment in the prophets ("The Cup of Wrath," ch. 14). Dunne also discusses the literal provision of wine, an important component in Pentateuchal theology. In the Mosaic Covenant, fruitful vineyards were a sign of God's blessing; their loss, a sign of God's disfavor ("Cultivating God's Vineyard," and "The Loss of God's Vineyard," chs. 5, 11)

In spite of the positives in Kreglinger and Dunne's works, both suffer from three problems. First, both are connoisseurs and desire to drink. They are also heavily influenced by ecclesiastical traditions, especially Kreglinger. That has caused them to read the evidence in a certain way. Of course, writing without some goal or even bias in mind is impossible. This work indeed also has a bias. It should be noted, however, that my position was uncertain when I decided to write. Though I come from a family and church background that held to temperance, a cursory reading of the evidence suggested to me that the matter was not that simple, and my view evolved as I got into the study. This work has coincided with my own adoption of a Mediterranean diet. As my diet changed and I started to understand how eating a Mediterranean diet would affect a person's sense of taste and change their appetite for what they wanted to eat, I started to understand much more about how an ancient person would have viewed their food. For example, when we think of the joy of having harvested grapes we naturally think such joy was produced by the prospect of wine. But in a culture with limited food options, even having a sweet and fresh grape to eat was a treat. Anyone doubting this should keep in mind a bit of British history. When oranges were first imported into England, they were viewed as a rare treat. Children would often receive one in their Christmas stocking. Oranges are common now, and gifting one in a stocking has gone out of fashion. Israel's joy at the harvest could have been largely similar to that of English children on Christmas morning. Israelites were getting one of the few fruits that could be obtained in great abundance. The same was likely true of the grape harvest regardless of the amount of wine that would be produced. Those perspectives needed further consideration than a wine connoisseur is likely to give them.

Second, both give inadequate consideration to the role of the grape in the ancient food supply. That, of course, is tangential to the issue of whether or not one should avoid intoxication and is a subject better treated in a separate paper. On the other hand, it is an important matter of

⁷⁴ Dunne has a heavy emphasis on wine in the Eucharist. This emphasis might suggest a sacramental approach to some when he states "what Jesus says cannot be reduced to *merely* an extended metaphor for faith. It must also mean that one who believes in him continues to commune with him through eucharistic practices" (219). But his conclusion that "bread and wine were consumed to commemorate the inauguration of the new covenant, to proclaim the death that made it possible, and to experience the ongoing presence of Christ with us until he returns" (219) is in line with the understanding many evangelicals including Baptists. It seems to construe it as more than a remembrance of Christ and less than a transubstantiated or consubstantiated presence of Christ.

context to establish how much wine was likely available for consumption or even had to be produced. We should not assume that the ancient farmer had to make wine simply because there was no other way to store the grape harvest. Grape harvest primarily begins in June and may run into September.⁷⁵ They probably ate a lot of fresh grapes when in season. Some would have been boiled down into dibs, a syrupy sweetening agent and something that could be reconstituted into a beverage at a later time if one desired. Beyond that they probably made a lot of raisins, a food they would have viewed differently than us. In a diet where 50-75% of the calories were provided by grain, raisins would have been considered a sweet treat.⁷⁶ To appreciate this fact one need only consider the menu of the aforementioned feast Abigail provided for David's men. Though she provided 2 skins of wine, the feast included "a hundred clusters of raises and two hundred cakes of figs" (1 Samuel 25:18). The dessert did not involve pastries, pies, or cakes, but lots of dried fruit.⁷⁷ The feast was provided for David in conjunction with the sheepshearing, which normally occurred in May.⁷⁸ So these raisins had been stored at least eight months. Even given their age they were deemed a fitting gift for a celebratory occasion where gaining the goodwill of the guest was a matter of life and death.

Adding to this confusion regarding how much wine had to be stored are normally reported statistics concerning the production of wine. Kreglinger asserts, archaeological evidence of ancient Israel suggests that these small family-owned vineyards produced around 182 gallons or approximately 694 liters of wine per year, amounting to two and a half bottles of wine a day with some extra wine for special occasions. Two and a half bottles of wine per day is a significant amount for a family, but you have to remember that wine was their principal drink.⁷⁹

Family farms were often worked by multiple generations and could include 10-20 people once children, hired hands, and servants were considered.⁸⁰ Suddenly, 182 gallons sounds like a lot less when it amounts to less than 5 ounces a day per person.

The final and most serious deficiency present in both works is that mild intoxication is permitted and even to some degree encouraged. In all fairness, both authors offer some cautions about the dangers of drinking. Kreglinger advises that people should drink mainly wine in the context of a meal, only after 5:00 p.m., and for enjoyment as opposed to alleviating stress. She stresses the importance of shared meals for building a community. She even commends observing "dry January."⁸¹ That warning seems to put her position in line with that of this discussion, but it is not since she still encourages moderate intoxication. As she explains,

Not all intoxication is seen as negative, and the Bible speaks freely about the positive effects of a slight level of intoxication. Psalm 104:15 specifically emphasizes that wine is supposed to add an extra level of gladness and merriment to our lives. I call this holy

⁷⁵ Philip. J. King and Lawrence E. Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 99. See also Nathan MacDonald, *What Did the Ancient Israelites Eat?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 22

⁷⁶ MacDonald, *What Did the Ancient Israelites Eat?*, 19. He based the estimate on a survey of various archaeological studies.

⁷⁷ The term indicates either a bunch of raisins such as might occur on a branch or a pressed raisin cake.

⁷⁸ Hoffner, *1 & 2 Samuel*, Logos Bible Software.

⁷⁹ Kreglinger, *Cup Overflowing*, 30.

⁸⁰ Stager and King paint a fictionalized portrait of the household of Micah in Judges 17-18 (*Life in Biblical Israel*, 9-19). They set the number of persons in the father's household at 17, and suddenly 2.5 bottles of wine a day becomes 4 ounces of wine per day. David's family, the house of Jesse, provides another example. It consisted of 7 sons, any unnamed daughters, and even possible workhands (1 Samuel 17:20).

⁸¹ Kreglinger, *Cup Overflowing*, 214.

intoxication. This slight level of intoxication allows merriment and gladness to gain momentum and create a special kind of openness and trust where guests share more freely and vulnerably. ... To become open, trusting and vulnerable always includes a risk, but the call to love each other invites us to this deeper, more trusting, and more vulnerable way of knowing and bonding with each other.⁸²

Dunne's warnings provide no such specific drinking guidelines, instead focusing on various contexts where alcohol use is inappropriate. Using alcohol to exploit a victim, which figures prominently in several Biblical narratives, is a serious sin.⁸³ The victimized drinker, however, is not necessarily censured for being drunk. The problem drinker is censured for "habitual drunkenness, and drunkenness that leads to sins of omission or commission, the ritual worship of gods other than YHWH, or the neglect or exploitation of the poor."⁸⁴ These qualifications notwithstanding, commands to be sober are usually better taken as "apocalyptic image[s] for alertness, alongside other such images like being awake and being ready for war."⁸⁵

Since I am not arguing that the Bible commands complete abstinence (e.g. "thou shalt not allow any alcohol to ever pass thy lips)," the practical question becomes how much a person can drink before they have crossed the line into sinful intoxication? The answer to that question does not presuppose that one should then endeavor to drink the maximum allowable amount or even drink at all. But the answer to that question will dictate the point at which a believer's Christian liberty ends. Of the biblical commands to avoid intoxication, Ephesians 5:18-21 provides the clearest guidance for determining the allowable degree of control.

Drunkenness and Ephesians 5:18-21

This text contains two contrasting commands: do not be drunk with wine but be filled with the Spirit. But considering the context in which they occur proves helpful. The first half of chapter 5 contains several broad directives. "Sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not be named among you" (5:3). To say that it should not be named among you refers to the perceptions of believers and unbelievers alike.⁸⁶ Any type of "filthiness" is also forbidden. The term refers to "various forms of shameful and obscene conduct (as well as speech)."⁸⁷ Specific speech sins to avoid are identified as "foolish talk" and "crude joking," probably a reference to anything dangerous for or antithetical to wise living.⁸⁸ Believers are to "walk as children of light" and "try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord" (5:8, 10), both of which will be hindered by alcohol.

⁸² Kreglinger, *Cup Overflowing*, 144.

⁸³ Dunne, *The Mountains Shall Drip Sweet Wine*, 139.

⁸⁴ Dunne, *The Mountains Shall Drip Sweet Wine*, 250-51. He draws similar conclusions from his discussion of Proverbs in chapter 9, "Consuming Alcohol Wisely," 117. On page 139 he similarly states "literal drunkenness ... should not characterize the people of God, because it will lead them away from the kingdom and inhibit preparation for the impending judgement."

⁸⁵ Dunne, *The Mountains Shall Drip Sweet Wine*, 139.

⁸⁶ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 321.

⁸⁷ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 322. Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002), 655, also concludes the noun has reference to the actions specified in verse 3 and the speech specified in verse 4.

⁸⁸ The is used only in Ephesians 5 in the NT and never in the LXX (Arnold, *Ephesians*, 322, and Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 655. The adjectival form indicates that which is "unwise" or "devoid of understanding" (Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew*, s.v. μωρός) The noun form would thus refer to speech that is unwise with no basis in good understanding.

Restricted Understandings of Ephesians 5:18-21

Dunne certainly affirms scripture prohibits heavy use since it precludes “a life characterized by drunkenness,” a reference to extreme enslavement commentators would universally accept.⁸⁹ But he narrows the main concern of the passage considerably to the early house church context. He explains,

[the] prohibition against drunkenness, is often understood to pertain to one’s personal or private consumption of alcohol. But as we have seen, this passage is focused on the corporate gathering of the church. ...

What Ephesians depicts ... in its broader context of corporate eucharistic worship and the ensuing household codes, is how the house church ... combines the two spheres of singing—the domestic and the cultic—and makes them one and the same.⁹⁰

Dunne’s argument postulates that the same abuse addressed in 1 Corinthians 11:17-22 was occurring in Ephesus.⁹¹

Since churches met in houses and shared meals were common, Dunne raises a valid concern. The danger of drunken worship was real and had to be avoided. But his understanding of Ephesians 5 would allow latitude, perhaps with some frequency, to drink to the point of mild intoxication. The problems with this position are twofold: the context is too narrow and the allowable level of intoxication is too high. As already noted, the preceding context in Ephesians 5:1-14 is much broader than the house church. Its imperatives cover matters of personal morality and public opinion while commanding discernment. Commentators normally discuss several more limited background contexts for the prohibition against drunkenness. Included along with problems in the Ephesian church worship are mantic rites in Greco-Roman religions and mealtime practices of Roman culture. But the numerous references to abuses in Jewish extrabiblical, New Testament, and Greco-Roman sources testify to a problem transcending any one context. Further testimony comes from the emperor Domitian’s order in light of food shortages. So much wine was being produced that he issued an edict “forbidding anyone to plant more vines in Italy and ordering that the vineyards in the provinces be cut down, or but half of them at most be left standing.”⁹²

The consensus of recent evangelical commentators is that a broad contextual reference for Ephesians 5:15-21 is intended given the prevalence of this wine abuse. Included among those drawing a broad application are Arnold, Baugh, Lincoln, Snodgrass, and Thielman.⁹³ As Arnold summarized, “drunkenness was a widespread problem that was not isolated. ... There is nothing in the text itself to suggest that Paul is warning against a particular and specific kind of abuse.”⁹⁴ He further asserts, “coming under the influence of alcohol is one such activity that one needs to

⁸⁹ Dunne, *The Mountains Shall Drip Sweet Wine*, 95.

⁹⁰ Dunne, *The Mountains Shall Drip Sweet Wine*, 229, 231.

⁹¹ Dunne, *The Mountains Shall Drip Sweet Wine*, 94.

⁹² Suetonius, *The Lives of the Caesars*, ed. G. P. Gould, trans. J. C. Rolfe (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979): 8.7. Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius*, trans. F. C. Conybeare (London: William Heinemann, 1912): 6.42, makes similar reference to the events. Suetonius further notes the edict was not carried out. The historical references were suggested to me by Baugh, *Ephesians*, Logos Bible Software.

⁹³ Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 348-49, 360, S. M. Baugh, *Ephesians*, EEC (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2015), Logos Bible Software, Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 700, Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, WBC 42 (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 343-44, Klyne Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 289, and Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2010), 358.

⁹⁴ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 348-49.

stay away from completely.”⁹⁵ So Dunne’s conclusion is tendential, focusing too much on the following context and too little on the preceding context.

Ephesians 5:18-21 in the Context of 5:15-21

Looking at the immediate preceding context, Ephesians 5:15 commands believers to look carefully “how you walk, not as unwise but as wise,” and “not be foolish.” Walking carefully suggests “strict conformity to a standard or norm, w[ith] focus on careful attention.”⁹⁶ It suggests a meticulous accuracy and is used to describe the initial careful teaching of Apollos regarding Jesus and the even more accurate explanations provided by Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:24-26). What Apollos taught was completely accurate up to the point of John the Baptist’s ministry. More instruction gave him more understanding, but it did not change what he taught up to the point of John the Baptist.

Returning to the subject of wine, what this careful walking would entail is specified in greater detail in verses 15b-21.⁹⁷ First, believers are to walk not as unwise, but as wise, a reference alluding to the biblical wisdom corpus. To be wise as Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes portrays it is a task requiring effort and mental discipline. Proverbs in particular deal with a sweeping array of topics in government, family life, personal work habits, financial dealings, and individual deportment (speech and behavior). Verse 16’s participle of manner specifies that careful attention facilitates using our time most wisely.⁹⁸ Though the days in which we live are evil and temptations to sin abound, consistent godliness helps one avoid personal temptations while simultaneously taking advantage of every opportunity for ministry.

The second set of contrasts are stated as an implication of the command to walk carefully in wisdom. Believers must “not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is” (5:17). The unwise person in verse 15 is “the ἄσοφος [who] lacks mental insight.” The foolish person in verse 17 is the “ἄφρων, [the one who] is unable to apply knowledge practically.”⁹⁹ Taken together the words indicate one must first have accurate insight or wisdom. But that insight must be followed by correct application to various contexts, an application which is often challenging to arrive at due to the nature of wisdom literature. Proverbs are often stated enigmatically while encompassing overlapping truths. The interpreter must first understand how a proverb describes God and human beings. Next, the interpreter must consider proverbs addressing similar situations. Finally, the interpreter must go through the additional step of figuring out how each might inform the present situation. Proverbs 26:4-5 provides a well-known example.

Answer not a fool according to his folly,
lest you be like him yourself.

Answer a fool according to his folly,
lest he be wise in his own eyes.

Each proverb might be relatively simple to understand read in isolation. But both are true and must be considered when considering how to handle a fool in his folly. This kind of

⁹⁵ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 360.

⁹⁶ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, rev. and ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), s.v. ἀκριβῶς, hereafter BDAG, Logos Bible Software.

⁹⁷ Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 286, notes these three “‘not ... but’ contrasts.”

⁹⁸ The participle manner is identified by both Arnold, *Ephesians*, 346, and Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 692.

⁹⁹ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 696.

understanding followed by wise application of overlapping proverbial truths is often required in Proverbs, and similar examples of overlapping truths from Proverbs are numerous.

One could argue by application and inference that Ephesians 5:15-17 precludes one from ever being under the mind altering influence of alcohol. To do so would hinder one's ability to be wise, putting one at risk of neglecting the commands throughout chapter 5 and their entailments when clear thinking is required. The spiritual and mental demands of walking in wisdom are hindered any time one reaches a BAC of .02% or higher.

Ephesians 5:18-21, of course, specifically addresses being under the influence of alcohol through the use of the two final contrasting commands: do not be drunk with wine but be filled with the Spirit. In so doing it may be using it a specific example of something that would make one unable to "understand the will of the Lord" (5:17). Hoehner suggests as much, noting verse 18 "may be an explicative conjunction which points to a further explanation of the preceding statement" while suggesting the glosses "that is" or "namely" as listed in *BDAG*.¹⁰⁰ The negative and positive are contrasted in straightforward fashion as noted below.

1. And do not get drunk with wine,
 - a. for that is debauchery,
2. but be filled with the Spirit,¹⁰¹
 - a. addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,
 - b. singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart,
 - c. giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,
 - d. submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

The space given to the positive command to be filled with the Spirit suggests it is the main emphasis of these mutually exclusive commands. So understanding what the command not to be drunk with wine means is best done in conjunction with understanding the second command, to be filled with the Spirit. When a physical object is full, it has run out of room. The disciples' boats were filled with fish, for example, after the miraculous catch and began to sink (Matthew 13:48). They had no extra capacity (for fish or anything else). If the boats could hold anything else, they might be described as almost full, nearly full, or even virtually full. But they are not full if they can hold anything else. Of course, for a person to be filled with the Spirit does not involve a volumetric measurement of a purely physical substance. Rather, To be filled with the Spirit means "to experience a complete degree of involvement in ... [a] state."¹⁰² In this case, the believer is to be completely involved the state of being controlled by the guidance of the Spirit.

The command to be filled with the Spirit has been variously interpreted to mean either that the believer is completely filled with the Spirit or that the believer is in "the dynamic realm

¹⁰⁰ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 699. He cites *BDAG*, s.v. καί.

¹⁰¹ The Greek conjunction ἀλλά is generally considered the coordinating conjunction most likely to indicate a strong contrast (see Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996], 671). See also Richard Young, *Intermediate New Testament Greek* (Nashville, TN: B & H, 1994), 180. Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 697, interprets the conjunction in this way.

¹⁰² Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, 2nd ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), s. v. 78.46 πίμπλαμαι; πληρόομαι, Logos Bible Software. The active form of the verb carries the same meaning as the passive in this instance.

or sphere established by ... the Spirit.”¹⁰³ Either way the implications for being controlled by alcohol are the same. If the believer is filled with the Spirit then the Spirit must have all of him or her. If the reference is to the realm controlled and empowered by the Spirit, the Spirit has complete control over that realm. He must be allowed to influence, guide, and even control every part of a person. If he is doing so, there will be no part of the believer that he is not controlling. It is unthinkable that a believer would allow anything to displace the control of the 3rd person of the Trinity in his or her life.

The text specifically contrasts being filled with the Spirit with being drunk with wine. Unlike the Spirit, wine is not a person. But it does have a similar ability to influence, guide, and control every part of a person, to bring me “under the control of an external power.”¹⁰⁴ Once I have decided to let it take over, it will influence and even control me by depressing all brain functions, hindering physical performance, impairing my thinking, learning, and memory, modifying my mental focus, reducing anxiety, giving me a potentially misleading sense of pleasure, and interrupting my sleep patterns, all of which were described in greater detail above. That control is probably why the Greek commands here are passive verbs, and I obey them only if I allow myself to come under the control of something one thing but not under the control of another. As Walter Liefeld stated, “while [both are] ... command[s], something we are responsible to fulfill, [both are] ... something that we *allow* God to do for us.”¹⁰⁵

Given the meaning of the terms and the fact that they are set up as mutually exclusive activities, they cannot be done simultaneously. So drunkenness makes one guilty of two sins. Drunkenness is both disobedience to a divine command in its own rite and a decision to cut oneself off from divine control in favor of substance control. That control of the Spirit produces several results which are specified or alluded to in Ephesians. Walking in wisdom as opposed to foolishness is important due to the nature of the time in which we live. This care and caution to live wisely are precisely what starts to ebb away once one reaches a BAC of .02%.

Results of Spirit Filling

The first result of being filled with the Spirit involves the mind and heart. Believers can speak to each other in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. This applies any time or place believers interact with each other and should not be limited to a church setting.¹⁰⁶ The terms describe the communication of accurate doctrine and indicate that operating under the Spirit’s influence, believers can minister effectively through “edification, instruction, and exhortation.”¹⁰⁷ Such songs, however, are not merely doctrinal formulations. They are heartfelt, “com[ing] not just from the lips but from the ... innermost being.”¹⁰⁸ So speaking to each other

¹⁰³ Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2010), 360. Thielman takes the second position. For a defense of the first position, that the believer is filled with the Spirit, see Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010)348-51.

¹⁰⁴ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary 42 (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 344.

¹⁰⁵ Walter L. Liefeld, *Ephesians*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1997), 5:18, Logos Bible Software.

¹⁰⁶ Baugh, *Ephesians*, Logos Bible Software.

¹⁰⁷ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 344.

¹⁰⁸ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 346.

in various songs and making melody to the Lord with the heart involves an “emotional response ...[based on] one’s intellect and ability to reason and choose.”¹⁰⁹

The third and fourth results identify character qualities frequently manifesting themselves in our interpersonal relationships. Being filled with the Spirit leads to giving thanks “always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Such a spirit of thanks “permeates believers’ whole lives” to the degree that they “give thanks not just sometimes for some things but always for everything.”¹¹⁰ Being filled with the Spirit also leads to a mutual submission. This mutual submission manifests itself as Christians “actively deny themselves and focus their attention on the needs of others in the body.”¹¹¹

In contrast to these good results by being filled with the Spirit, being drunk with wine leads to reckless or even wasteful behavior demonstrating “a lack of concern or thought for the consequences of an action.”¹¹² Louw and Nida suggest the term might be translated as “‘what one does without being able to think about it’ or ‘what one does when the mind is absent.’”¹¹³ So debauchery indicates wasteful or reckless behavior. We should not think that debauchery indicates only extremely bad, “over the top,” activities. It can mean anything we might do without exercising proper judgment. It is exactly the type of behavior described above once one has exceeded a BAC of .02%.

Some may argue that the .02% level is too low given the general sense of scripture that people consumed wine somewhat regularly. But choosing a higher maximum BAC given the scientific and even simple observational evidence of alcohol’s effect on the mind and emotions puts one in the uncomfortable position of having to choose some other level of control. It indicates a willingness to depart from the Spirit’s control and enter the realm of wine’s control, even if that control is minor in duration and extent. One wonders why this level of control should not be considered sinful in the same way as little white lies and a momentary lustful glance at a seductively? And returning to the original question, if we do not adopt .02%, then what other level would we adopt? Consider some of the other seemingly valid options.

Some might suggest the maximum legal to drive in the United States, .08%. Certainly for a believer to have a BAC of .08% (legal DWI) disobeys the command not to be drunk. At such a level, “Muscle coordination becomes poor (e.g., balance, speech, vision, reaction time, and hearing), harder to detect danger; judgment, self-control, reasoning, and memory are impaired” leading to “reduced information processing capability ... and impaired perception.”¹¹⁴ At that level one is well beyond exercising the type of control scripture envisions.

How about a BAC of .05%. Is a person sinning by allowing this level of control? As it turns out, people at this level exhibit “exaggerated behavior, may have loss of small-muscle control (e.g., focusing your eyes), impaired judgment, usually good feeling, lowered alertness,

¹⁰⁹ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 354.

¹¹⁰ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 346.

¹¹¹ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 356. Arnold’s discussion of the meaning of submission in general and this context in particular is helpful.

¹¹² Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, s. v. 88.96, ἀσωτία, Logos Bible Software. The root occurs in the New Testament only four times (Luke 15:13, Ephesians 5:18, Titus 1:6, and Ephesians 5:8).

¹¹³ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, s. v. 88.96, ἀσωτία, Logos Bible Software.

¹¹⁴ United States Department of Transportation, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, “Drunk Driving,” accessed June 24, 2024, <https://www.nhtsa.gov/risky-driving/drunk-driving>.

release of inhibition.”¹¹⁵ The impaired judgment and release of inhibition also make this an unacceptable level. We need good judgment and certain inhibitions in place at all times in order to make the best decisions regarding our obedience to Christ, so such a person is certainly disobeying the directives in Ephesians 5:18-21.

How about at a BAC of .02% and above? Has somebody crossed the line of what the Bible considers acceptable at this point? At this level, the drinker’s is “relaxed [with a] slightly altered mood, [and is] slightly warmer [as] GABA + endorphins [are effected].”¹¹⁶ There is also “some loss of judgment, ... decline in visual function (rapid tracking of a moving target), [and a] decline in ability to perform two tasks at the same time.”¹¹⁷ So a driver should still consider themselves to be impaired. It is still a risky activity, and Algeria, China, Columbia, Estonia, Monaco, Norway, Poland, Sweden, and Ukraine have set .02 as their legal limit.¹¹⁸ Even if one is not driving, however, by the time the BAC is .03% “people become more talkative, they feel less inhibited and experience a mild euphoria.”¹¹⁹ They are more willing to engage in a risky activity even though they are somewhat more risk averse than at higher levels.¹²⁰ It is still enough of an effect to frustrate the filling of the Spirit upon which the believer must constantly depend. To choose a slightly higher level still seems to put one on a sliding scale of disobedience.

Conclusion

Wine begins to affect every aspect of a person even at very low levels. The effect is demonstrable beginning at .02%, and it is extremely broad. It negatively hinders physical performance, thinking, learning, memory, creativity, and sleep. Many would perceive alcohol’s ability to reduce anxiety and enhance pleasure as positive effects. The reduction of pain in certain instances is certainly a potential benefit. Even those perceived positives, however, often become negatives. Pain tells the body that something is wrong and that one cannot go about their normal activity without healing first. Anxiety is also often purposeful, driving us to appropriate caution. And anxiety is best handled by relying on the Lord. As Philippians 4:6-7 commands, “do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses every thought, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

For a believer to allow alcohol to control them to any degree violates the imperative in Ephesians 5:15-21 to live life carefully. To do so requires one first to be wise by understanding fundamental truths of God’s nature and creation. Those fundamental truths must then be applied in complex and varied life situations. Doing so is no easy task. But it will necessarily involve not being filled with wine while being filled with the Spirit. This continual filling is the only way believers may fittingly express truth to others from the heart, continually praise the Lord, and deny themselves while focusing on the needs of others. There are a number of reasons believers might disobey those commands without being controlled by alcohol (or any other drug). But the use of mind altering substances is a prime avenue through which such disobedience can occur.

¹¹⁵ United States Department of Transportation, “Drunk Driving.”

¹¹⁶ Nutt, *Drink?*, 20.

¹¹⁷ United States Department of Transportation, “Drunk Driving.”

¹¹⁸ World Health Organization, “Legal BAC limits by country,” October 26, 2018, accessed June 25, 2024, <https://apps.who.int/gho/data/view.main.54600>. Twenty-two countries actually set 0% as their legal limit.

¹¹⁹ Jones, “Alcohol, its absorption, distribution, metabolism, and excretion,” 3.

¹²⁰ Jill Seladi-Schulman, “How Alcohol Affects You: A Guide to Drinking Safely,” *Healthline*, August 30, 2019, accessed July 22, 2022, <https://www.healthline.com/health/how-much-does-it-take-to-get-drunk>.

This necessarily leads to the question of how a believer can actually consume any alcohol without having it affect them. And then there is the medical issue. Given the nature of alcohol, many now note that people should not consume any alcohol. And where does scripture's portrait of even a low alcohol use fit in with these issues? The answer to that question requires that we understand the other factors listed in the introduction. First, how does the body process alcohol and second, how does what I am eating affect the rate of alcohol processing?